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Matrilocality and Patrilineality in Mundurucú Society

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121 114 UNILINEAL descent and unilocal residence, by definition, follow one of but two possible lines, the male or the female. Simple arithmetic would therefore dictate that there are four possible combinations of common descent and residence. Only three of the combinations, however, are found to have any frequent and reliable occurrence. Kroeber (1952:213) noted the single lapse in the following observation:

> "Logically the possibility arises of a fourth plan of society: matrilocal but patrilineal . . . I do not know of such a society, and should expect its occurrence to be rare."

This combination is certainly unusual, and ethnographic literature yields practically no descriptions of its unequivocal occurrence. In most cases, the unilocality or unilineality of the group is questionable. For example, Loeb and Broek (1947:418) claim the Karen people of Burma to have patrilineal clans and matrilocal residence. However, the sources which they cite in support of this contention (Marshall 1922; Heine-Geldern 1923) do not warrant such positive affirmations as to the rule of descent. This conclusion with regard to the Karen is verified by Murdock (1954). Residence rules are likewise subject to misinterpretation, for in many cultures matrilocality is frequently a temporary state followed by permanent patrilocality.

541 613 [131] In 1952 the writer discovered the co-existence of matrilocality and patrilineality among the Mundurucú Indians of the upper Tapajós River in central Brazil.[1] Existing information on the Mundurucú had led me to believe, before field research, that the group was patrilocal. Subsequent field investigation proved the contrary to be true, and gives us one of our few authenticated accounts of a patrilineal group in which postmarital residence is permanently matrilocal.

121 The purpose of this paper is to present the pertinent data for the use of students of social organization, to describe how such a system functions, and to discuss its significance in terms of the evolution of social structure. Consideration of the latter problem will be reserved until the conclusions of this paper, for much of the discussion will hinge upon what seems incongruous, nonfunctional, or dysfunctional in Mundurucú society. This material, when analyzed [179] with reference to the limited amount of historical data available, suggests strongly that the Mundurucú shifted from patrilocality to matrilocality in the first half of the nineteenth century. The bearing of such a change upon Murdock's observations (1949:190) on the difficulty of a transition from patrilineal to matrilineal descent becomes immediately apparent when it is considered that much of Murdock's position depends upon his persuasive argument that a patrilineal society can change from patrilocality to matrilocality only with great difficulty. It would seem that this shift in residence patterns is possible under certain conditions which will be analyzed functionally among the Mundurucú. Matrilocality, following Murdock's use of residence as a determinant